

**TOWN OF RYE - BOARD OF SELECTMEN
WORK SESSION
Monday, June 17, 2019
6:00 p.m. – Rye Jr. High**

Selectmen Present: Chair Phil Winslow, Vice Chair Keriann Roman (arrived 6:23 p.m.) and Selectman Bill Epperson

Others Present: Acting Town Administrator/Finance Director Becky Bergeron

I. CALL TO ORDER

Chair Winslow called the work session to order at 6:02 p.m. and led the Pledge of Allegiance.

II. WORK SESSION – Review and Discussion of Charrette Presentation

Plan NH is an organization made up of architects, engineers, contractors, planners and others who brainstorm recommendations to address challenges a community may face. Plan NH conducted a charrette for Rye's town center on May 31st and June 1st.

Chair Winslow explained that the board will be discussing the charrette (which was presented to the community on June 1st by Plan NH). They will review each slide from the charrette and discuss the recommendations. The Selectmen would like comments from the public regarding each of the recommendations (there are a total of seven that were given by Plan NH).

Highlights from the charrette presentation:

Resident's comments:

- Preserving the quintessential town center is important to the community.
- Increasing the safety and access on Washington Road is also important.
- Residents suggested a multi-generational community gathering place.
- A clear plan is needed for the town hall and buildings within the town center.
- Residents would like to see things done in the town's center that can be done in a reasonable timeframe within a reasonable budget.

Plan NH prepared an asset map of the various buildings in the center of town that are owned by the town. The town needs to make a decision on the future for the Parsonage and the old trolley barn property.

Recommendations:

1. **Create a plan for traffic calming through the center of Rye.**
 - Currently, the travel lanes on the roadways are 12'x12', which is typical for vehicles traveling 50mph. The suggestion is to consider 10ft or 11ft travel lanes with a sidewalk installed on the west side of Washington Road. Additional trees and plantings could be planted along the sidewalk.

- Install raised crosswalks at the junior high, Parsonage and town hall for pedestrian crossing.
- Make the intersection of Washington Road and Central Road a “T” with a stop sign at the top of Central Road connecting to Washington. The monument would be moved behind the town hall with a pocket park created.
- There is a small park (Range Park) in front of the junior high which could be expanded on the west side of the road by having Wallis Road come in to a “T” intersection.

Alex Herlihy, 55 Lang Road, spoke about the idea of having Range Park on the other side of Wallis Road with a turn onto Washington. He also supports the narrower roads and the raised crosswalks to slow traffic.

Katharine Brown, 541 Washington Road, spoke in support of a left-hand turn onto Wallis Road.

Veronica Morrow, 149 Fern Ave, asked for clarification on “raised” crosswalks.

Victor Azzi, Old Ocean Blvd, explained that a raised crosswalk is about 6ft long and is referred to as a speed table. It is much like a speedbump but is a more gradual approach. The vehicle would come up gradually to that level and then down to the roadway level.

Susan Cole-Ross, 333 West Road, commented that she is excited about the plan and the idea of having a town center.

A resident from 1 Central Road encouraged the town to look at a few different options before making any decisions.

Jane Holway, Washington Road, made a suggestion for more speed enforcement.

Mrs. Cronin, 546 Washington Road, supports the plans for traffic calming because the roads through the town center are not safe. She would like to hear someone from DPW talk about the consequences of raised elements on the roads and whether there are other alternatives.

Selectman Epperson noted that speed tables are used on narrower roads, which helps to slow the traffic down significantly. Anything that can be done to slow traffic down in the middle of town should be looked at.

Kathy Hodson, 616 Central Road, supports any ideas that makes walking in the historic center safer. She also spoke in support of keeping Rye’s center a historic residential center of town.

Mr. Azzi spoke in support of the traffic calming ideas. He also suggested that they give some consideration to round-a-bouts.

Steve Borne, 431 Wallis Road, commented that he likes the idea of moving the monument and creating green space. He also supports the idea of a walking trail around Parsons Field.

Selectman Epperson asked Public Works Director, Dennis McCarthy, for information about the right-of-way from the Public Safety Building to the junior high. He asked if sidewalks would be viable.

Director McCarthy explained that right now there are travel and bike lanes on both sides. The right-of-way is fairly wide so it would depend on how the sidewalks are engineered. Depending on the width of the sidewalk, a bike lane may be lost. If the sidewalks are going to be done, they have to be done to the correct width. Right now, the bike lanes are not at the right widths, as they are narrower.

Mark Josephs, 540 Washington Road, spoke about the changes he has seen since living on Washington Road and the issues of safety on that road.

Chair Winslow asked Police Chief Kevin Walsh his thoughts on changes to the roads and the intersections.

Chief Walsh stated that there needs to be a huge campaign for education and awareness for any changes that are made. One of his goals is to get a traffic count of how many cars travel Washington Road during the week versus the weekends. He will have this information for the board to help with considering changes in that area.

Mrs. Brown suggested the town post a 30mph speed limit sign right in front of the police station.

There was some discussion about the possibility of lowering the speed limit on Washington Road to 25mph. Chief Walsh commented that a speed limit of 30mph should be sufficient, as it is a matter of education, awareness and enforcement.

Paula Tsetsilas, 12 Rock Orchard Lane, stated that reducing the traffic speeds seems to be the most common goal for the town. She suggested the idea of introducing cobblestones into the town center to give it a historic New England feel while helping to slow traffic.

Scott Bogle, RPC Senior Transportation Planner, spoke to the group about a federal grant through the Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP Grant), which is a program that opens to applications every two years. The grant covers 80% of the project with a minimum project size of \$400,000 and a maximum of \$800,000. The program criteria is based on history of safety, along with the given improvement of safety the project would add to the corridor. The Town of New Castle has recently received a grant to address traffic, pedestrian and bicycle safety in their town.

2. Use of the Parsonage

- Incorporate the Parsonage into the library “campus” to use for middle school aged children programming.

Karen Allen, Rye Library Trustee, 81 Grove Road, noted that the Library Board has looked at the Plan NH Plans and discussed their recommendations. The trustees are not excited about the idea of a teen center in the Parsonage. Studies have shown that it is important to keep the community interacting with each other and not segregate the generations. She also noted that it would create a need for an increase in funding in order to have enough staffing to cover each area.

Mrs. Tsetsilas stated that Rye Recreation has identified the need for after school programming for the middle school children. The recreation department’s intent was to provide “drop-in” programming that would be chaperoned. She thinks the Parsonage makes more sense as space for Rye Recreation with it not being limited to just “teen” space.

Mr. Herlihy suggested that the Parsonage could be used as an expansion of the town museum.

Ray Jarvis, 83 Liberty Commons, commented about the importance of strategically discussing the town's needs which can be satisfied by the town center, while identifying and considering the town's assets.

Jeff Ross, Library Trustee, 333 West Road, supported the comments of Mr. Jarvis. The library has done a lot of ground work in figuring out what their needs are and have identified critical needs. It has been found that a lot of the needs are needs that are felt across the town. Some of the needs could be solved by the library and shared with other enterprises. He suggested forming a group to come up with a plan for the entire town center.

Selectman Epperson noted that there is a one-page executive review of the Parsonage on the town's website. The review gives a history of the Parsonage, the funds that have been spent on the building and what the building could possibly be. This is good information for residents that are seeking further information. He also encourages residents to visit the town's website and read the 'Vision for Rye', which is a strategic plan for the center.

Mrs. Hodson spoke about the children being in four different places across the town. She thinks it would be more sensible to keep their activities consolidated.

Mrs. Tsatsilas noted that there was a committee that looked at the best use of the town's schools. The preschool program, which has been in Greenland, is now going to be housed at the elementary school. The fifth grade students will be at the middle school, which will allow for dedicated space for Rye Recreation at the elementary school. The middle school is mostly at capacity now. There is some space below the gym that could be converted for middle school programming. Rye Recreation is aware of that space but they are also looking at some space at the church.

Mrs. Guiard, Perkins Road, spoke about the parking issues that can develop at the library at times. She does not see the room for parking at the Parsonage.

Chair Winslow stated that one of the ideas was to provide a sidewalk from the church to the library. There is parking in front of the church beside the town hall that is not being used, which is town owned land.

Referring to the Master Plan, Mr. Borne stated there is nothing in the plan that says who is responsible for getting the things done and when. If that could get into the Master Plan it would help the town to move forward.

Selectman Epperson stated that he agrees there has been some confusion about who is responsible for what. He thinks in the last year or so, the town has come together pretty well to figure out where there is synergy among different committees. Hopefully the town will start to move in some direction that is positive.

Sally King, Wallis Road, stated that she was taken aback by the fact that people who have been housed in the Parsonage, some for over 20 years, are being relocated when one of the goals of the charrette was affordable housing.

Selectman Epperson stated that they labored over what to do with the elderly population that was there. There were a number of meetings that were held where they were looked at town owned property for The Housing Partnership to build affordable or elderly housing. Unfortunately, that did not come to fruition because there was not that kind of space available. A lease on the Parsonage for five years was not a viable proposition for The Housing Partnership. They needed a ninety-nine year lease to get the funding that was needed to rehabilitate the building.

Chair Winslow stated that in order to get funds to do a full modification of the building, The Housing Partnership said that they would need four more apartments. They were proposing to add onto the Parsonage to the block house, which would bulk the downtown area with apartments.

Dan Philbrick, 1393 Ocean Blvd, supports the Selectmen's decision on the Parsonage. It is a historically significant building and should be restored. He loves the idea of the museum moving into the building. Over the years, it has not been maintained well. The library is a very significant property in the town and this is an abutting property with wonderful history. It was very clear in the listening sessions that the residents love the historic charm of Rye's Center and the library. He applauds the Selectmen for not getting into a long deal with the Parsonage.

Chair Winslow commented that the Parsonage is a work in process. The charrette identified it as an opportunity but there was not a clear vision as to what to do with it.

3. Town Hall

- Open up the second floor for town activities, voting and social occasions.
- Add a small appendage to the back of the building for needed office space.

Chair Winslow stated that he sees the addition as a distraction from the historic town hall. He thinks if the trolley barn was razed, which has no historic value, with a small building being built for five or six offices, it could by-pass the need for an additional attachment to the town hall.

Karen Stewart, 546 Washington Road, commented the town has already voted on that. This was one of the proposals a couple of years ago that was turned down.

Mrs. Tsatsilas supports the idea of converting the second floor space back to a meeting area for various boards. It could also be a space that could be rented out. She noted that she is sitting on a committee to look at other places in town for voting. The schools are closed for voting and sometimes that could be three school days per year. That space could be used for some of the smaller elections.

Chair Winslow noted that the town hall is not ADA compliant and that will need to be done moving forward. He explained there are funds in the budget to bring in an architect to look at the inside of the town hall to reconfigure it to make it ADA compliant. If the intention is to save the second floor, that will have to be considered because there is not be enough office space on the first floor for the staff.

Julie Tucker, 960 Washington Road, does not support the idea of splitting the staff up into two buildings, as the departments work together at times and this would not be efficient for the staff.

Mr. Herlihy stated that the great room in the town hall was used for all these ideas from 1873 to 1985. He does not support the addition. There are other options where a one-story town hall could function. He thinks if there was a lot more education and public input with regards to the TD Bank property, there may have been a different outcome at town vote.

Selectman Epperson stated he was disappointed that the bank went down in flames. All of the staff could have been moved to that building and then a decision could have been made with the town hall. If the decision was to move people back into the town hall, the bank property could be sold.

Mr. Borne spoke about the availability of space above the apparatus bay at the Public Safety Building, which could be used for town purposes.

Mr. Ross commented that they need a town wide solution for solving these problems because many of them are interconnected with each other. He reiterated that they need to get a lot of people from a lot of different organizations to talk about how to pull these plans together with global thinking and planning. He noted that the town is going to celebrate its 400th anniversary in 2023. It would be nice to have some of these projects completed in order to celebrate these goals.

Mr. Jarvis spoke about the need to consider all the town's assets when making decisions for the town center. He also supports bringing the town hall back to what it once was and not put money into trying to make it for more offices.

Chair Winslow stated the Selectmen intend to put together a matrix of all the ideas that have been discussed and look at them in terms of efficiency, effectiveness and cost.

4. Coffee Shop on the Parsonage property – block building

Mrs. Tsetsilas likes the ideas conceptually; however, she is not sure it is the best place for it.

Sarah Quinn, Perkins Road, pointed out that there will be an increase in traffic and parking, which makes the traffic calming so important.

Jaci Grote, Washington Road, expressed her concern that a third coffee shop would affect the success of the other two shops.

Mr. Borne spoke about the idea of it being a satellite business of one of the other shops, as the size of the building would limit substantial food service.

A resident from 1 Central Road spoke about the general store in the Town of Kensington, which also has a space for meetings and functions. She suggested doing some tours of other towns to look at other options and ideas.

5. Former TD Bank site

- Pocket housing development with apartments from 400sf or homes to 2500sf.

Selectman Roman asked Dan Philbrick to offer some comments.

Mr. Philbrick, property owner (of the TD Bank site), stated the main reason he bought the building is because he feels Rye needs a bank. He was very disappointed, after 57 years of business in Rye, that the bank decided to leave. There is a restriction on the property that it cannot be another bank for five years. He noted that the town will have a new bank which will be on Central Road next to the post office, so the need for a bank has now been satisfied. He stated that the TD Bank property is a significant piece. He has done some small cottages in town that have been very popular and well received. He loves this idea; however, it would have to be done extremely tastefully. He sees it more on the lines of Strawberry Banke, New Castle, and old colonial style buildings. A lot of the cluster homes are more modular looking and that is exactly the opposite of what the town is looking for in the center. From a capitalistic view, he loves the idea but he thinks the town people are going to say it is too many units in one place. He thinks the town has spoken on the town hall and that they want the structure to remain but there has not been a clear solution. He thinks a solution would be to trade the Parsonage for the TD Building. He would restore the Parsonage, with its eight units, to its historic state. The town would have the TD Bank property. This would not diminish the absolute significance of the Parsonage, which is a very important part of the town's heritage and community. He does not think a warrant article for a million dollars is going to pass in order to restore the Parsonage. The building is going to fall down and it should be preserved. The TD Building is a good property for the town to own. He thinks there are some fabulous ideas from Plan NH but he worries about another project being pushed down the road.

Speaking to Mr. Philbrick, Selectman Roman stated that the Plan NH folks presented this idea as a way to get more inexpensive housing in town. She asked if he feels this is possible.

Mr. Philbrick stated that he does not think the community of Rye would be pleased with what low income housing can afford to put in the center of town. He would not put his name on something that was not built to the quality that Rye Center deserves. He reiterated that it needs historic integrity. He does not think historic can be done with low income.

There was some discussion about "affordable" housing versus low income housing and the need for homes to attract younger families.

6. Loop trail

- From Parsons Field entrance looping back behind the town hall.

Mrs. Allen spoke in support of the loop trail. She also suggested that the trail be handicap accessible.

One of the residents spoke about the joys of walking around town and the interactions with neighbors.

Mr. Josephs noted that the trail would go across his private property. He has opened up the property to all people who walk in the woods. He has done a tremendous amount to keep that area rural and unencumbered. He thinks the trails should be enjoyed for what they are. He would not be in favor of anything with asphalt in order to make the trails handicap accessible.

III. OTHER BUSINESS

Chair Winslow asked for people to vote on the idea that they feel is a priority.

- Traffic calming, sidewalks and intersection change – 10 Votes
- Do something with the Parsonage – 3 Votes
- Coffee shop in block building – No votes
- TD Bank pocket neighborhood – No votes
- Loop trail – 2 votes

There was discussion on considering the priorities while looking at the whole plan for the town center, based on the town's assets and needs.

ADJOURNMENT

Motion by Bill Epperson to adjourn at 8:13 p.m. Seconded by Phil Winslow. All in favor.

Respectfully Submitted,
Dyana F. Ledger